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The initial stage of second language learning usually aims to develop the ability to converse. This conversational ability is, however, rarely the ultimate object of second language instruction. The student may want access to the literature of the culture of the second language, or to get an education in it. For these reasons, interest shifts toward reading and writing, two skills which tend to dominate the intermediate and advanced levels of second language instruction; and the student advances toward the time when he will be treated as a native speaker of the second language. The unstructured conversation of six-year-old native speakers does not differ substantially in syntactic complexity from that of adults. The child, however, has much to learn in the areas of organization and style. The task of a pre-literature text for a native speaker is to (1) teach the organizational patterns which enable an adult to raise conversation to the level of systematic instruction, narration, or coherent exposition; (2) consider the extent to which alternate ways of saying something are equivalent; and (3) prepare the child to recognize the conventional patterns of style. It is suggested that intermediate level language materials be differentiated from elementary level materials in both methodology and content. Emphasis should be less on pattern practice of single sentences and more on close reading and controlled writing of longer units of sentences. (AMM)

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On Intermediate Language Instruction

Tommy R. Anderson

The aural-oral approach to second-language teaching is based on, among many other things, the assumption that language learning can proceed best if the student is first prepared to respond to and in his new language as he would have to respond if he were to be confronted with a native speaker of that language with whom he had to communicate. Thus the initial stage of second-language learning usually aims to build up what may be described as the ability to carry on a conversation. This conversational ability is rarely the ultimate object of second-language instruction, however, and the student soon reaches a stage where he begins to try to achieve whatever his own ultimate object may have been. He may want access to its literature or to the culture of the people who speak it. Or he may want to get an education in it which he would be denied using only his native language. In either case there will be a perceptible shift of interest toward reading and writing, and these two skills tend to dominate the intermediate and advanced levels of second-language instruction.

Unfortunately, this produces a real discontinuity in the instructional process. By their very nature, reading and writing are not as amenable to close structural control and massive practice as are the conversational skills. Two of the reasons for this are the relatively larger part of conversation which is phatic in nature and the relatively smaller units which make up the typical conversation. Because so much of real conversation is phatic, it is possible to play-act the same thing repeatedly without any overwhelming sense of unreality. And because the typical units of conversation—greetings, leave-takings, question-and-answer sequences, instruction-and-response sequences, statement-and-contradiction sequences, and the like—are so short, both linguistically and temporally, a lot of practice can be achieved in a short time. On the other hand, very little in reading and writing except parts of personal letters or greeting cards, for example, can be properly described as phatic; most of the reading and writing we do has other purposes. And almost any structural unit of the written language goes beyond the three or four sentences that suffice to describe most conversational units. The discontinuity between the conversation-dominated initial stages and the reading-and-writing dominated later stages of second-language study, then, is real, and intermediate level materials must somehow wrestle with it.

Many of the processes by which this discontinuity is bridged are obvious. At first, reading and writing are kept as close as possible to the conversational level. Reading selections are short and are prepared for by oral practice. Often they are followed up by oral questioning. The first work

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in written composition is likewise preceded by thorough oral preparation and followed up—if it is followed up at all—by similar oral activities. Only gradually is the student turned loose. Reading selections become longer and there is less preparation. Composition is likewise demanded in longer and less conversational forms with less preparation. The student finds himself advancing toward an eventual day of reckoning when he will be treated just as if he were a native speaker of the language he is studying. How far off this day of reckoning is, no one seems to know; very few students have ever reached it in practice. Or—to say the same thing in another way—we are regrettably vague about what we mean when we say that the student will be treated just as if he were a native speaker. Inevitably we must ask how we would treat—or do treat—a native speaker.

Let us begin by sketching what the native speaker of English faces when he encounters the written language and especially when he encounters literature. There is first of all the rather startling fact that the unstructured conversation of six-year-old children does not differ substantially in syntactic complexity from the unstructured conversation of adults.[1] This underscores again that a six-year-old child knows his language completely in some not-yet-well-defined sense. We are in the habit of assuming that he will learn vocabulary, but experience shows us that he also has much to learn in the areas of organization and style. It seems increasingly clear that Firth and his colleagues are on solid ground when they point out that language exists in certain definable ranges.[2] We do not acquire all of these ranges at once, but rather we progressively differentiate them from each other as the educational processes proceed. The basic range is probably what we might term "small talk" or casual conversation. This is what most people engage in most of the time, and it differs from the other ranges in being fundamentally disjointed. Because it is carried on face to face, it has a factor of self correction built into it which eliminates to a large extent the need for careful forethought. Because it is a rapid give-and-take, there is little possibility of forethought anyway. Hence conversation tends to structure itself into relatively short and easily defined sequences such as greeting and leave-taking sequences or questions and answers. The transitions between such sequences may be quite arbitrary, and the sequences themselves are so constructed that the utterances within them support each other contextually. Hence conversation is full of fragmentary pieces which properly constitute what is left after deletions from complete utterances. A recent monograph by Elizabeth Bowman provides a good deal of back-handed insight into what goes on.[3] It is this range that the pre-school child and the adult both share.

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[1] Milagros R. Aquino and Dennis Lee Brown, "Linguistic Analysis of Children's Speech," Southwest Regional Laboratory progress report, Nov. 18, 1966.

[2] See, for example, J. R. Firth, "On Sociological Linguistics," *Language in Culture and Society*, ed. Dell Hymes (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), pp. 66–70.

[3] *The Minor and Fragmentary Sentences of a Corpus of Spoken English, IJAL*, XXXII, 3, Part 2 (July, 1966).

In English, though not necessarily in all other languages, we can see a number of different elaborations of material which we might expect to find in relatively unstructured form in casual conversation. Commands or instructions can be sequenced and the corresponding linguistic responses removed to produce a set of directions. The need for questions of a self-correcting kind can be reduced in narrative or expository writing by careful organization and by taking the forethought to answer beforehand most of the things which readers or listeners may ask about. This is the main feature which sets story telling apart from casual narration or the expository lecture apart from informal counselling sessions. We may consider this differentiation to be a middle ground. When a student enters school, he is not normally prepared to give a careful set of instructions, to tell coherently without omission a connected story, or to explain anything in a systematic way.

Thus far we have differentiated conversation from instruction, explanation, or narration mainly on the ground that the self-correcting factor of give-and-take has been eliminated. This elimination requires us to impose some form of organization on our language. The organization form does not permit the sort of deletion which can go on in conversation; hence these forms contain large numbers of syntactically complete utterances when compared with conversation. However, organization can become something of an end in itself. This leads to style and to all of the things which we must associate with style. It begins to appear that whereas mere communication would use grammatical processes in accordance only with some overall and only half arbitrary principle of organization, something which contains a style would use the same processes under further arbitrary socially defined conventions which would constitute the style. If this is true, then we may search in vain for gross quantitative measures which can differentiate a Hemingway novel from the coherent narrative of someone reporting about it. What would differentiate would be the fact that Hemingway systematically deflected his language from some sort of norm. Richard Ohmann attempts to define the Hemingway style as a persistent use of reported speech, a use which is far greater than the actual content of the narrative demands.[4] This is compensated for by a systematic disuse of extended structures of modification and certain other grammatical processes. My own observations have shown me that Eugene Nida has a strong tendency to use nominalized verbs rather than clause structures, while Charles Hockett uses such nominalizations surprisingly rarely. In both cases these are linguists writing about linguistics, so that the subject matter of the two selections was substantially the same. It seems likely that what we may call prose style will be reduceable to systematic deflection in the expected number of occurrences of a relatively few transformations rather than in some overall quantitative index of transformational depth. If so, then the definition

[4] Richard Ohmann, "Generative Grammar and the Concept of Literary Style," *Word*, XX, 3 (1964), 423–439.

of style is likely to be specific to each author—something to be determined only upon examination of his writings and not pre-determined in terms of some index or series of indexes for all authors.

The idea that an author can systematically manipulate the frequency of particular transformations suggests that there must be some sense in which different transformations can serve the same purpose. There are many kinds of modification, for example, and many alternatives to modification. We may say, "The destruction of Nineveh was considered to be a turning point in world history," or "When Nineveh was destroyed, it was considered to be a turning point in world history," or we may say "The fact that Nineveh was destroyed was considered to be a turning point in world history." In these sentences the idea of destruction is used as noun subject of the sentence, as verb in a subordinate clause of time, and as verb in a modification structure modifying the subject. The essential information communicated is the same. The vocabulary used is the same as far as root content words are concerned. The organization of ideas is the same—we have not changed the relationship between *destroy* and *consider*. Style as we have defined it must work within alternations such as this. If transformations alter the fundamental organization of ideas or can not be avoided in expressing ideas, they obviously affect content and not style. Hence we should not expect to find a difference in this regard between casual conversation on the one hand or any of a whole range of possible styles on the other. Linguistically, that much transformational depth is inherent and must be discounted in arriving at any kind of index. It should not differ from one person to another, and this should hold true regardless of education and differences of temperament. But in fact such completely determined relationships in language are either non-existent or very rare. Hence there is an important grammatical problem involved in determining possible alternate utterances and thus defining some sort of possible limit on stylistic variations.

Even above this level of linguistic organization, there is a further level. This defines the line between what may be considered prose in some sense and what must be considered poetic language or poetry. A great part of poetry would be lost if it failed to concentrate upon some kind of manipulation of the surface form. That is, poetry in the narrow sense contains systematic rhythm and rhyme, and the symbol or the balance period of certain kinds of prose also represents systematic manipulation of the external form and consequently verges into poetry. Much of our humor—most notably the pun—also depends upon systematic manipulation of the external form. Hence this also defines a line between what is prose in the sense that it intends to communicate and what is humor in the sense that it tends to elicit laughter as well as to communicate.

Much of what we acquire in our educational system is simply an awareness of and a sensitivity to such linguistic ranges. If so, then, the difference between the six-year-old and the adult will reside in the fact that while the six-year-old controls conversation, the educated adult controls much more. How much more is open to question. I think that we have not been very

successful in teaching this substance. We should expect the adult to do a better narrative, a better instruction, a better explanation, or a better imitation of some range of style than the child. But I do not know how much better it would be, and I do not know exactly where the line between child and adult would normally fall for a given population or a given task. Certainly the normal teenager can mimic the style of popular singers much more effectively than the normal adult. At least I would say this on the basis of unsystematic observation. Could the average teenager mimic Walter Winchell or Robert Frost?

The task of a pre-literature text for a native speaker, then, can be summed up under three main points. First, it must teach the organizational patterns which enable an adult to raise conversation to the level of systematic instruction, narration, or coherent exposition. This is an organizational question in part and a question of empathy in part. To take an obvious case, a set of coherent instructions normally is given in a rigid order: the chronological order in which the instructions are to be carried out. This is an organizing principle of great importance, but like many other obvious principles, it is only obvious after you know it, and the six-year-old child does not yet know it. He can not tell you coherently how to play a game, and the chief defect in his attempt will be that he has not thought about the proper place to put various instructions. He will also be defective in empathy. He will not have attempted to anticipate the places where his instructions will be ambiguous or unclear. He will not have attempted to take into account the special knowledge that he has which someone else might not have. Essentially the same points could be made for narration or exposition.

Second, a pre-literature text would have to consider the extent to which alternative ways of saying something are equivalent. The native-speaking child may not realize that there are situations where two grammatical patterns really amount to the same thing. Abstractions like "the destruction of Nineveh" have long been known to present difficulties—difficulties which could be removed if the child were made consciously aware of such alternative forms as "when Nineveh was destroyed" or "the fact that Nineveh was destroyed." The traditional educational system takes up this question as a question of vocabulary building; *destruction* is learned on the basis of what the child already knows about *destroy*. But equivalences like the one given above are rarely if ever spelled out. They are left to be intuited by someone who knows the grammar.

Third, a pre-literature text should prepare the child to recognize the conventional patterns which we call style. It seems unlikely that just any deliberate warping of transformational probabilities will lead to a style. The warping occurs and must occur along socially defined lines. Establishing a new line or creating a radical stylistic departure is something which takes the greatest genius to achieve and which probably can be accomplished only once or twice in a century. Such schools as romanticism, naturalism, or stream of consciousness writing have achieved their effects in part by a re-structuring of the prevailing kinds of stylistic modifications. We do not teach

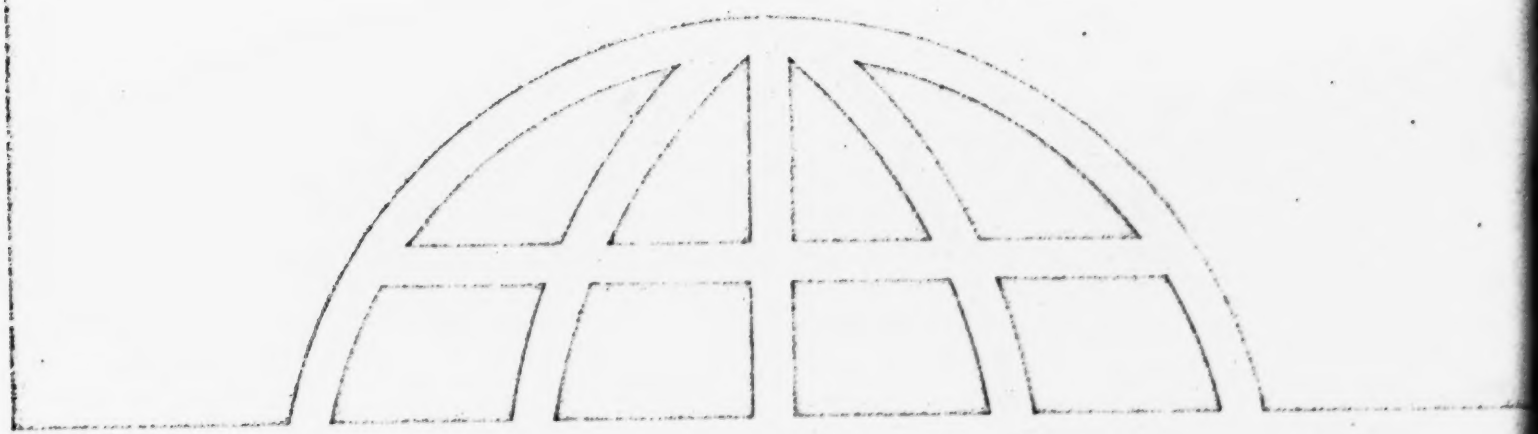
this kind of originality in a pre-literature text. Rather, we attempt to establish some kind of awareness that such a selection goes on and what such a selection may entail in a particular style.

A pre-literature text for the intermediate instruction of second-language speakers would have to do all of this but would labor under two possible kinds of modification. First, the students for whom the text was intended would not know the grammatical processes in every case. They would have to work with an incomplete ability to interpret the information which their grammar provides. For example, there are Filipino students who do not have the capacity to get the tense information from such a sentence as *I left my muddy shoes by the door* and are not able, therefore, to define exactly what this sentence says about the time at which the shoes were muddy. We derive this sentence from *My shoes were muddy. I left them by the door*, and so the shoes were muddy at a time in the past. The sentence simply says nothing about whether they are still muddy, for *be* can not be interpreted tense-wise in the same way that *leave* is interpreted. That is, if I left, I am not still leaving, but if my shoes were muddy, they may or may not still be muddy. This leads to the curious phenomenon that, except where generalizations are involved, English verbs like *be* tend to take their tense from surrounding verbs, while verbs like *leave* base their tense primarily upon the time of the action. A pre-literature text will have to make this clear by presenting the student with situations where an interpretation like this is necessary for proper comprehension. Then the interpretation will have to be forced with an appropriate question and the generalization reinforced with appropriate writing exercises. Many other instances of this sort can be cited. A pre-literature text must probably wrestle with such deficiencies on the interpretive level. That is, a student must be questioned in such a way that he becomes aware of the information conveyed within the pattern. We have accumulated overwhelming evidence from testing of this sort that Filipino students often really are not capable of such interpretation. Then creative oral and written exercises within an appropriate framework of controls can be used to follow up and fix the new structure.

Just as we must cope with the fact that our students may not have a full English grammar, so we must cope with the fact that they may have learned something about style and/or organization in studying their first language. Some of this may carry over. Hence, where the students have received a good education in their native language, it may not be necessary to spend as much time teaching organization as we would have to spend with native English-speaking students because they might have learned some of it in connection with their previous instruction. On the other hand, some languages have a narrower range of options in the area of style than English and may lack certain kinds of differentiation which would be important to note in reading or writing English. Many of the languages of Asia, for example, do not distinguish clearly between a literary style and a scientific style in writing. Students who have received a substantial part of their education in such languages may tend to carry over all that they learn

about literary English into their scientific writing and vice versa. Hence a knowledge of the stylistic and organizational resources of a background language in which second-language students of English have received a large part of their education may be as necessary for a pre-literature text as an examination of the structural features of such a language is for elementary instructional materials.

I wish to suggest, then, that intermediate language materials may have to be differentiated from elementary language materials along lines both of methodology and of content. They may have to place less emphasis on pattern practice with isolated sentences and more emphasis on close reading and carefully controlled writing of units which go beyond the limits of a few sentences. Though many people have talked about the analysis of such units, relatively little has actually been done to define and exploit them outside of the give-and-take of conversational sequences. What the "basic dialogue" has done for elementary language instruction may have to be duplicated at the intermediate level with "basic narrative," "basic exposition," "basic description," and "basic instruction" sequences. But attention would inevitably shift from isolated sentences and their structure to the larger structure which unifies the whole piece and to the possible alternative structures which might have been used at the sentence level instead of the ones that actually were used. The roles which tense, article usage, pronominalization, the intonational system, and stereotyped ordering of materials play in unifying these larger structures would be presented to the students in an explicit way. These features of English cannot be considered as unifying factors when they are taught in isolated sentences, and we have paid for our failure to teach their unifying function in that we have permitted students to produce sentences which would be correct enough in isolation but which are glaringly wrong in context. And, of course, a basic knowledge of equivalent forms for expressing a given idea is just as useful in enabling the second-language speaker to achieve a style or to define the style of others as it is to a first-language speaker. If intermediate materials are thought of within this framework, they can avoid the pitfalls of being an attempt to do remedially at the last minute what should have been done properly from the beginning or of providing the student with a smattering of pseudo-culture as a pretext for getting him to practice his language skills.



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